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ABSTRACT

In language instruction, students do not learn to elicit needed information in the classroom or in real, everyday communicative situations because (1) the material they ask questions about in class is basically uninteresting to them, and (2) many student responses that would be incomprehensible to a non-English-speaking person are left uncorrected in class because they are understood by the teacher. Learners should acquire basic inquiry skills very early in their second-language career, premitting their active movement deeper into the language and permitting them to ask a native speaker what is being discussed, where things are, how to get needed objects, and how to find out what they should or should not say in a given context. In this case, communicative competence is a realistic objective because strong student motivation already exists. Learning activities leading to inquiry skills should be carefully sequenced from the outset, moving from mechanical learning to free communication through mechanical drills, meaningful drills, communicative drills, and communicative interaction and developing cognition, perception, abstraction, and interaction capabilities. It is possible to provide a wide variety of activities for practice in relatively natural pseudo-communication in class. Sample activities and a four-page bibliography are included. (MSE)

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Interrogative Competence

Robert M. Terry

January 1982

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DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE, FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER

ACTFL MASTER LECTURE SERIES

Interrogative Competence

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January 1982

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FOREWARD

For the past several years, prominent members of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) have been presenting lectures to the faculty and staff of the Defense Language Institute, Foreign Language Center. The purpose of these lectures has been to discuss recent trends and developments in foreign language learning and teaching as well as to strengthen professional contacts between DLIFLC and ACTFL.

The ACTFL Master Lecture, "Interrogative Competence," by Dr. Robert M. Terry was presented at the DLIFLC in January 1982. This paper is published to make the content of the lecture fully accessible to the DLIFLC professionals.

The ideas and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent an official position of the DLIFLC nor of any other element of the United States Department of Defense.

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Perhaps a better title for this paper should be "Interrogative Incompetence," since one overriding problem we foreign-language teachers encounter daily is the fact that our students simply cannot ask questions. The cause of the problem is obvious: most of the questioning that occurs in a foreign-language learning situation is teacher-generated. These questions, which are peculiar to the classroom, lack the normal circumstances which prompt questions: the asker (1) does not have certain information, (2) wants it, and (3) expects the person asked to have it.[1]

In a very recent article concerning the military significance of language competence, it was pointed out that

> After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, we had the opportunity to question a defecting Russian soldier, who had sought asylum in the U.S. Embassy. We failed to exploit this opportunity, however, as we had no one on the embassy staff who could speak to the defector in Russian.[2]

The article continues, stating that

> The acquisition and processing of tactical intelligence depend on the skill with which an interrogating team questions local civilians and captured prisoners. Without language facility, intelligence specialists are impaired in, or precluded from, the successful completion of their mission.[3]

Needless to say, even this short-range goal of foreign-language competence for any eventual aren of use goes far beyond the basic questions of "How are you?", "What is your name?" and "What time is it?"

Nonetheless, the

> ability to ask questions with ease and to recognize question forms effortlessly, so that one can reply appropriately, is the essence of communication. It has always been a basic classroom activity. Unfortunately, much question-answer material is very stilted, questions being asked for the sake of form, without attention to their real interest to the student.[4]

Furthermore, most teachers have been highly unrealistic, not only in teaching grammar but in most aspects of the language including vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation. Pragmatics notwithstanding, we feel that we are lowering our standards by allowing our students to use forms which smack of popular usage and pronunciation which is markedly less than native. But a language taught and learned for communication purposes is in fact not the stilted "Dick and Jane language" which our students parrot back to us in class: an impeccably pronounced, grammatically correct complete sentence dialogue along the lines of:

> What are you going to do?
>
> I am going to the movies.
>
> When are you going to the movies?
>
> I am going to the movies tonight.
>
> With whom are you going to the movies?
>
> I am going to the movies with my friend.
>
> Who is your friend?....

Such an unnatural dialogue is misleading to our students, and admittedly boring. Won't the students be surprised if and when they find themselves in a situation similar to that in our "basic dialogue" which will be much more like

Whadda ya' gonna do?

Go to the movies.

When?

Tonight?

Who with?

My friend.

Who's that?....

But we were not taught that way! We worked long and hard to appreciate our language and to master it. Allowing our students to use--even to hear--such forms will teach them "bad grammar" and "bad habits."

Our insistance on teaching language structure for its own sake, under the guise of stressing adequate communicative ability, has led us to crossed purposes. If indeed communicative competence is our goal in our classes, either our students must be allowed to deviate from target language norms during natural or simulated speech acts, or the goal of communicative competence must be abandoned.[5]

> Communication, even with error, is more important both intrinsically and motivationally to the learner and to his associates than fluency in a small but rigid set of language patterns. The person who can "say the most," albeit imperfectly, is the envy of a person with better pronunciation [and a better control of grammatical correctness] but who has nothing to say.[6]

I am in no way advocating that errors should be ignored at all stages of language learning, but that we must maintain a clear view of our priorities. When structure is being taught, error correction is a vital component of the class. Only if students grasp the impact of correctness can they subsequently

monitor their own target language production and adjust it so that it conveys the meaning intended. But when communication is being practiced, the message now becomes significantly more important than the code. As long as the message is being conveyed comprehensibly, albeit with errors, the student is indeed communicating. The true linguistic variation that exists in the speech of native speakers will not exist, but students themselves will call forth a wide range of structures in their attemps to communication a similar message.

Every natural language system is endowed with a wide range of variation in accent, style and level of speech [register]. There is no linguistic community which is perfectly homogeneous with all speakers using one standard or normative language system. Yet the fact that the members of any one linguistic community succeed in communicating with each other in spite of these differences is explained by the fact that those who speak the same language do not notice these differences as long as they do not hinder communication.[7]

Why, then, must our foreign-language students adhere to rigid constraints and rules of usage which smack of "ideal", textbookish, unnatural, normative language from which any deviation is labelled an impurity or a mistake? The imposition of these constraints at a stage in second-language learning where the students' linguistic sophisitcation is significantly less than the desire to communicate causes hesitation, uncertainty and stifled communicative efforts.

Narrowing our focus to questions, why do our students find it so difficult to elicit needed information both in class and in real, everyday communicative situations? A portion of this question has already been answered: the teacher asks most of the questions primarily to elicit information which is basically uninteresting both from and for the students: structural or vocabulary information and not that personal information which the student would be willing to share with his peers. Whether we are native speakers of the language we teach or not, we, as teachers, have learned to interpret the meaning of student ques-

tions regardless of the degree of correctness. This "psychic" gift, however, hinders us from making corrections in terms of how comprehensible these utterances would be to a non English-speaking native.[8]

Even so,

> given the amount of redundancy in the linguistic system, native speakers can obviously understand much nonnative speech, perhaps even a majority, even though the communications are not identical to those which they themselves would utilize in the same situation. In fact, they can often comprehend utterances that are linguistically quite corrupt phonetically, semantically and grammatically.[9]

Let us look at the real problems which arise when students use a foreign language in a normal, natural situation. We must look at six (6) different areas which are of interest to the foreign-language teacher:

1. What errors are made?
2. Which errors hinder communicative effectiveness?
3. Why are such errors made?
4. What criteria are used to evaluate inappropriateness and incorrectness?
5. What sociolinguistic constraints are imposed on certain interrogative forms?
6. Just how much leeway is permissible in an academic atmosphere which purports to be training students for functioning in a foreign-language environment?

Dr. Ted Kalivoda of the University of Georgia has published a study entitled "Take a Closer Look at your Students' Communicative Ability!", in which ten (10) communicative situations of an everyday variety were given to 42 third-

quarter Spanish students. Each of these situations solicited an elementary response in Spanish which consisted of a short question. The situations were presented orally in English to insure that all students understood the situations. The student responses were written in Spanish.

Two problems arise in the design of this study: problems recognized by Kalivoda.

(1) Would students have been able to reply orally to the communicative situations quickly enough to maintain normal communicative exchange? Writeen replies allowed time for "figuring out" the answers, a situation distinctly different from that found in pure oral exchange.

(2) Would students have been able to meet the first requirement of the communicative venture (listening comprehension) by understanding the context if given in Spanish rather than in English?[10]

His response to both questions: "If these two requirements were included, test results would likely have been even more disastrous."[11]

In reacting to the first problem [the validity of written responses in a situation calling for spoken language usage], the logistics of analyzing tape recordings poses certain not insurmountable problems which can be compensated for by taking into account forms which in the written language have different spellings but which in the spoken language would have approximately the same pronunciation.

As for the second problem [situation clues given in English and not in the target language], if the stimuli were given in the target language, entirely too many structural and lexical clues would be given to the students. If, in a natural conversation, a non-native speaker, especially at the beginning level, seeks information, the normal tendency is for the mental stimulus for the question to be couched in the native language and subsequently encoded into the

target language. Therefore, giving the clues in English is actually a more natural technique when dealing with American students. The fact that structural clues would guide the students too closely is demonstrated by giving Situation 1 in English, Spanish and French:

> You are seated next to an American who does not speak [French]. Ask him where he's from.
>
> Está sentado al lado de un Español que no habla inglés. Pregúntele de donde viene/es.
>
> On vient de vous présenter à un Francais qui ne parle pas anglais. Demandez-lui d'où il vient.

In all three languages, not only is the correct verb to be used in the question given [to be/ser/venir], but also the appropriate interrogative element [Where?/ ¿ De dónde?/D'où?]. The only operation necessary to generate the appropriate question is to transform an indirect question into a direct question by (1) changing the verb to the correct person, and (2) structuring the French question correctly using either est-ce que or inversion and the English question by inverting the subject pronoun and verb. Therefore the technique of giving the situational stimuli in the target language would falsify any study of student-generated interrogatives for natural communicative purposes and would investigate structure alone.

Using Kalivoda's study as a model, I designed a similar study of student errors in interrogation in French. Owing to the nature of the French language--the obligatory use of subject pronouns (as opposed to Spanish), and word order constraints, the variety of errors discovered is much greater than those in Spanish. Twelve situations were given to 101 intermediate-level French students. The situations were presented orally in English and the students responded in

writing in French. Students were given ample time in which to create their questions, but the next situation was presented when the majority of the students had stopped writing, thereby imposing a semblance of a more natural rate of oral exchange between two speakers.

To illustrate the most surprising results of the French study, notice on the graph [following page] the discrepancy between the number of questions asked by a possible 101 students and the number of students who actually communicated in each situation.

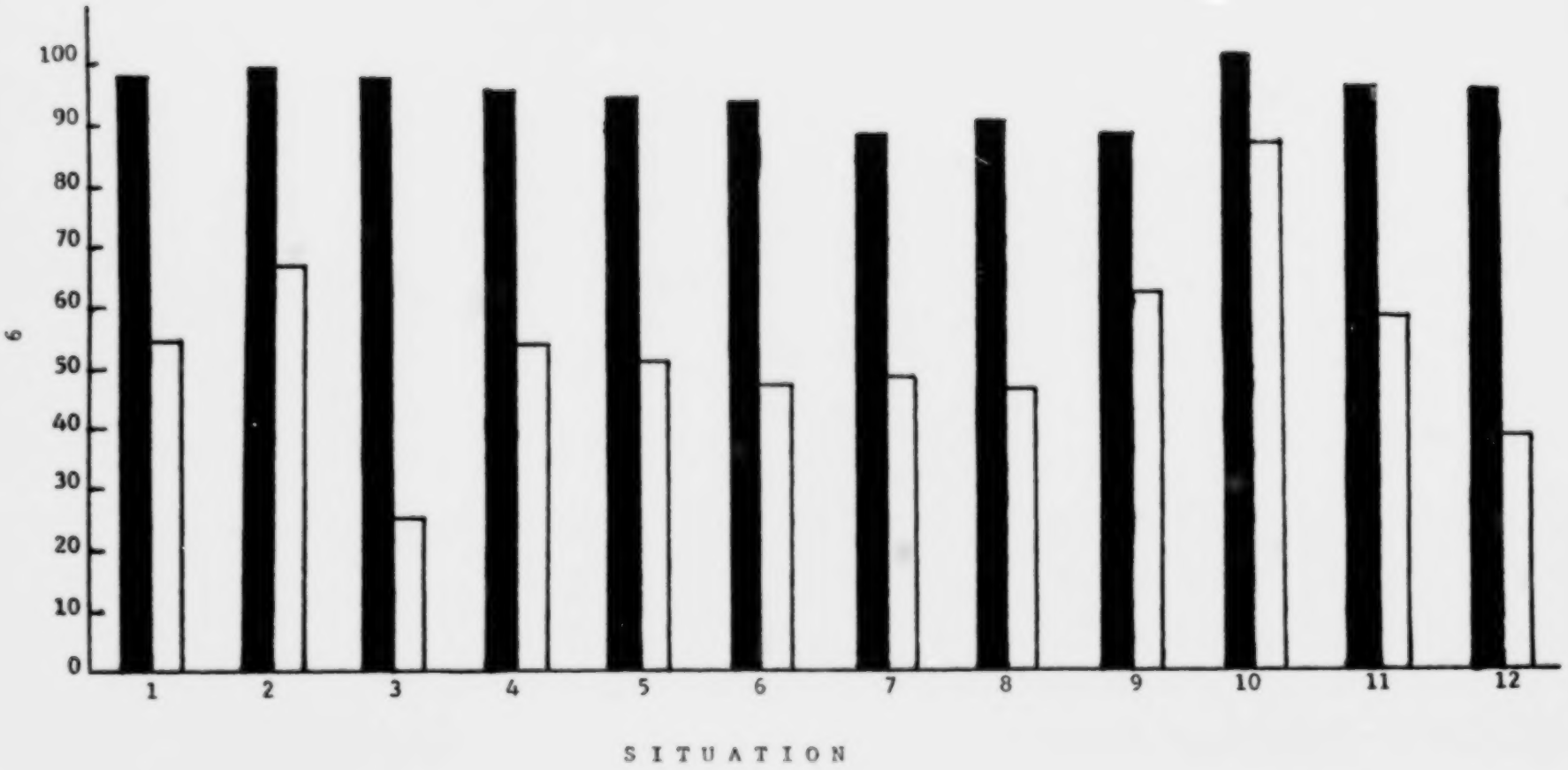
The results of both of these studies are quite awesome. I am sure that all of us are aware of the fact that students cannot ask questions, and we could also easily list the types of errors they make. Yet, when such errors are grouped together as in those two studies, we are appelled at the gravity and variety of the errors.

If we examine only the gross features in these two studies, we find that well over one third of both the Spanish and French students could not communicate their thoughts adequately enough to elicit the necessary information called for in the situations.

Of the basic types of errors committed by the students in both studies, certain ones stand out as significant in that they illustrate the major areas of confusion or lack of comprehension of the linguistic system they are studying.

1. The choice of an inappropriate interrogative word which would elicit information quite different from that actually being sought is quite prevelant. There is especially leveling of the personal/non-personal distinction [who?/what?], and confusion of adverbial question words [why? how much/many? when? where?].
2. There is a significant number of students who base their target language interrogative strurctures on direct, literal translations from

Number of Questions vs. Number communicating



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the cue words in the English situations, especially in those questions involving a present progressive form of the verb in English:

a. Ask him where he is going.
b. Ask me who's coming.
c. Ask me why I can't go (= am not going).
d. Ask me what book I'm reading.
e. Ask me what I'm writing with.

Surprisingly, however, there is not one instance where a parallel construction in either French or Spanish is based on a direct translation of the English structure as in "Do you like it?" or "Do you want a cup of coffee?", in which the English interrogative particle do is literally translated into the target language.

3. The use of appropriate verb forms--correct tense, person and number--appears almost indiscriminate. Significantly, there is a leveling of all persons to the third-person singular (Ask him where he's from. = Where is he from?). There is a random selection of tenses other than the present indicative (which is called for in all situations) with no communicative basis for such variation.

4. The use of appropriate vocabulary items, including spelling, gender and number, is quite poor. Even those high-frequency words such as book, cup, coffee, pencil, pen and car are misused or unknown. With verbs particularly, there is confusion between the many verbs indicating motion toward and motion away from: "to come" and "to go" for instance.

5. There is indiscriminate use of the proper determiner: a, the, some: "a cup of coffee" = "some coffee," "a coffee," "the coffee."

6. In the two situations which would elicit questions of much use to non-native speakers of the target language--"How do you say ___ in French/Spanish?" and "What does ____ mean?"--the degree of communica-

cative effectiveness is very low.

7. Students show very little ingenuity in creating questions using circumlocution or paraphrasing when they cannot immediately create a question bearing directly on the structure presented, since they lack the appropriate vocabulary or structures.

There is no simple explanation of why the students make the errors that they do as witnessed in the studies and in our classrooms. However, from the nature of those errors committed, it appears that the basic problems are

(1) interlinguistic interference from the native language,

(2) intralinguistic overgeneralization and confusion of synonymous interrogative features, in French especially, and

(3) exceedingly poor mastery of the fundamental vocabulary and basic structures of the target language.

We would logically expect our beginning students to model their target language questions on structures which are quite similar to those in the native language. In the case of the French study, this is not really the case. French has five (5) different interrogative structures which all have the same meaning. Rather than being taught in a sequence from the simplest for students to master and the most commonly used to the most complex and least common in the spoken language, teachers and material developers introduce all forms at once. Students fail to recognize the hierarchy of use and tend to combine synonymous forms in one utterance. Since we neglect to tell students which forms are more common in everyday situations, they quite frequently end up speaking the language even better, i.e., more grammatically correct, than the native speaker. In addition, the students find themselves unable to understand a native speaker's question which is at variance with what they have been taught in their textbooks.

Dr. Albert Valdman has studied the phenomenon of French interrogation particularly, including the sociolinguistic acceptability of certain interrogative forms and the pedagogical implications derived from his studies. It should be understood that the use of any particular form in a given situation is determined by stylistic and sociolinguistic considerations. Certain forms are considered most correct and most elegant; others are classified as "vulgar" or "low class."

> While a native speaker's overt comments about sociolinguistic aspects of his speech constitute important linguistic data, they do not necessarily reflect his actual linguistic behavior inasmuch as [what he actually says] is strongly influenced by his society's attitude toward permissible variation in speech behavior.[12]

Although "sensitivity to grammatical deviance varies from community to community, native speakers do seem to expect a high level of correctness from learners who have acquired a language by formal training."[13]

Two different studies published in the Winter 1980 issue of The Modern Language Journal, by Linda G. Piazza[14] and Vicki B. Galloway[15] have investi- the degree of tolerance of native speakers of French and Spanish respectively in relation to their comprehensibility and irritation level of the language of non-native foreign-language learners.

In Piazza's French study, it was found that

(1) The greatest tolerance of the native respondents was for errors of tense usage and agreement. Tense usage errors were found rather irritating but relatively comprehensible.

(2) Noun marker errors and word order errors showed the least consistency in rating. Incorrect word order was relatively non-irritating but was a problem for comprehension, almost as much as errors of verb forms and pronouns.

(3) The least tolerance was shown for errors of verb forms and pronouns.

(4) Errors were more readily tolerated (both more comprehensible and less irritating) in written than in spoken language samples.[16]

Galloway, in her Spanish study, found that the greatest number of errors, aside from pronunciation and accent deviations, was that of prepositions: they were omitted, extraneous, dangling or inappropriately chosen. The two second largest error groups were those of tense usage and the inappropriate choice of lexical items. Also prominent were misuse of object pronouns and the lack of proper subject-verb agreement. Yet, when the native and non-native teaching respondents were asked to what extent these errors obstructed communication, the mean response was around 2.5 (on a scale from 1-5), which indicates that such errors did not seriously impede overall communication.[17] It should be pointed out, however, that in neither of these studies were interrogative forms used as a source of student error.

One of the main reasons why the foreign language of so many textbooks and teachers is not an example of authentic spoken language is their desire to teach a correct, unified, normative language based on the pedagogical concern of "not complicating the students' lives," and of facilitating their learning of a foreign language.[18] However, language systems are above all a means of oral communication: in the history of mankind, as in the history

of each individual, the written language appears--when, in fact, it does appear--as a system secondary to spoken expression.[19] But most textbooks are structured around the written language--predictable, complete sentences, often archaic constructions and vocabulary, but always grammatically correct.

So, educated speakers will ascribe a substandard status to certain interrogative forms and such forms, therefore, do not appear in teaching materials, although, in fact, these very forms are found with a high degree of frequency in the spoken language.

Valdman advocates requiring foreign-language learners to speak "better" than native speakers, that is "to use a dialect and styles characteristic of the formal, monitored speech of educated native speakers." Nonetheless, the student should be able to recognize features found in the spontaneous speech of educated speakers "as well as in that of speakers in geographical areas or from social levels that show marked deviation from the prestige dialect."[20]

Yet, in a later article Valdman makes the following statement in discussing the acceptability of various French interrogative structures, notwithstanding certain sociolinguistic stigmas attached to certain forms:

> What is required (...) is a relaxing of linguistic purism to permit, on a temporary basis, the teaching of constructions that are fully grammatical in the target language though sociolinguistically stigmatized. The only risk involved is that students will have so well internalized these "crutch" structures that

> they will continue to use them when the more socio-linguistically acceptable but more grammatically complex equivalents are introduced.[21]

We most assuredly do not want to train students to use a level of language which is socially stigmatized as being incorrect or vulgar. At the same time, we need to face the fact that

> ...we are trying to teach too much--too few students are successful in acquiring the syllabus we have proposed. The percentage of students who are successful in mastering the majority of the syllabus for active use is probably less than 10%. [...] Perhaps, most of all, we need to reconsider our objectives: to what extent is it feasible in two years to prepare foreign language students for oral communication with native speakers?[22]

After all, what is our primary objective that can realistically be attained in two years--perfect performance or successful communication? accuracy or fluency? linguistic competence or communicative competence?

> Native speakers are not limited to using any one grammatical structure to achieve a given purpose. [...] By keeping in mind that language use is purposeful and (by) devising activities for practice in using that language to carry out basic purposes in a variety of situations, we can begin to help students learn to <u>function</u> in a foreign language.[23]

A learner should acquire very early in his foreign-language career the basic inquiry skills which will permit his active movement deeper into the language. He should be able to ask a native speaker exactly what is being discussed, where

things are, how to get needed objects and how to find out what he should or should not say in a given context. Active and conscious inquiry in the target language must be an important linguistic skill acquired by the second-language learner from the very outset.[24]

Classroom strategies which are employed in the teaching of any grammar point must be clearly ordered to ensure the student's moving from skill-getting to skill-using in the most effective manner. Yet, of primary importance is the ultimate goal and purpose of the study of any target language. If the ability to function in a truly communicative setting is our goal, we must ask ourselves if speech that contains errors should be tolerated in formal language acquisition.[25]

> One may question whether communicative competence is the most highly valued objective in a general language course. One may also wonder whether any significant level of communicative competence may be attained in the very constraining environment of the classroom. The observation of the classroom practices of most teachers and an examination of the tests they use and prepare leads one to conclude that their central concern remains knowledge of structure and that they consider the attainment of a minimal level of communicative ability as a secondary course objective.[26]

Since most of our students want to use the target language actively, primarily in speaking, communicative competence is indeed a realistic objective because the strong student motivation which is needed already exists. Our role as teachers is to teach the students to construct an appropriate framework, in as much detail as we feel necessary, for the expression of meaning. We cannot teach the students to express their meaning but we can provide opportunities to

stimulate the motivation for this totally personal activity to take place and we can help the student improve the framework so that it can really carry the message intended. How can this be done? By providing practice in pseudo-communication: communication in which the context is structured by the learning situation rather than springing autonomously from the mind and emotions of the student. "We bridge the gap to true communication by encouraging the student to use these structured practices for autonomous purposes from the early stages."[27]

Yet, in most of the structured practices that are provided by textbooks or which are teacher-created, the normative language of the ideal speaker/listener which has been selected is hardly characteristic of the speech used in natural face-to-face communication, even among middle-class educated adults, not to mention the spontaneous speech used by adolescents and young adults in the target language community.[28]

Faced with the inherent variability of the language to be learned, teachers and material developers have assumed that the learner would eventually acquire, by some sort of osmosis, the native speaker's variable range. This is not at all true; students either fail to notice the variations or are confused by them. Another attitude is to seek simplicity and symmetry in the presentation of normative rules which rarely are representative of the speech patterns to which students will be exposed when they hear authentic native-speech samples.[29]

However, foreign-language teachers are generally very reluctant to accept the transitional use of grammatically deviant sentences. Such a reluctance may stem from the greater sensitivity of native speakers to grammatical ill-formedness than to lexical deviance, or, in the case of non-native teachers, from the apparent lowering of standards by allowing a form of the target language which is at variance with that language which they themselves were taught.

> But given the artificial and contrived nature of classroom verbal interactions, the sociolinguistic assessment of speech found in a natural setting is irrelevant in the formal instructional context. The teacher and the learners do not form a linguistic community, and no veritable stigma can be attached to phonological, lexical, or grammatical deviance. Teachers must recognize the artificial environment and the heavy instructional demands of the classroom and adjust their goals to realistic ones.[30]

If the contention that the acquisition of near-native competence in a foreign language implies the ability to interpret widely variable authentic speech and to shift from one type of speech to another depending on the various sociolinguistic and psychological circumstances surrounding natural verbal behavior, we must be satisfied with less than near-native competence.

Our first step is to contrive samples of the foreign language which will exhibit less variation than natural speech so that beginning and intermediate-level students can attain a reasonable degree of communicative competence.[31] This is our first priority. Through the creation of pedagogical norms, we can help students construct the appropriate framework which will lead to the autonomous expression of meaning. A strategic sequencing of presentation of any grammatical structure is controlled only by the student's level of linguistic and lexical sophistication in the target language--just how much can (s)he absorb and comprehend at any one stage? This pedagogical norm does not claim to correspond exactly to the usage of educated speakers but it should assuredly be based on such usage. The norm is designed explicitly to facilitate the beginner's acquisition of the target language. If we expect our students to use the language for communicative purposes, we must accept the fact that their control of the

phonological and grammatical features will be significantly less than near-native.[32]

Students should be able to produce fairly homogeneous speech patterns which, at the same time,

(1) will not offend educated speakers of the target language,

(2) do not depart from those patterns that characterize natural speech,

(3) still reflect the important generalities of the system underlying natural speech,

(4) are readily learned, and

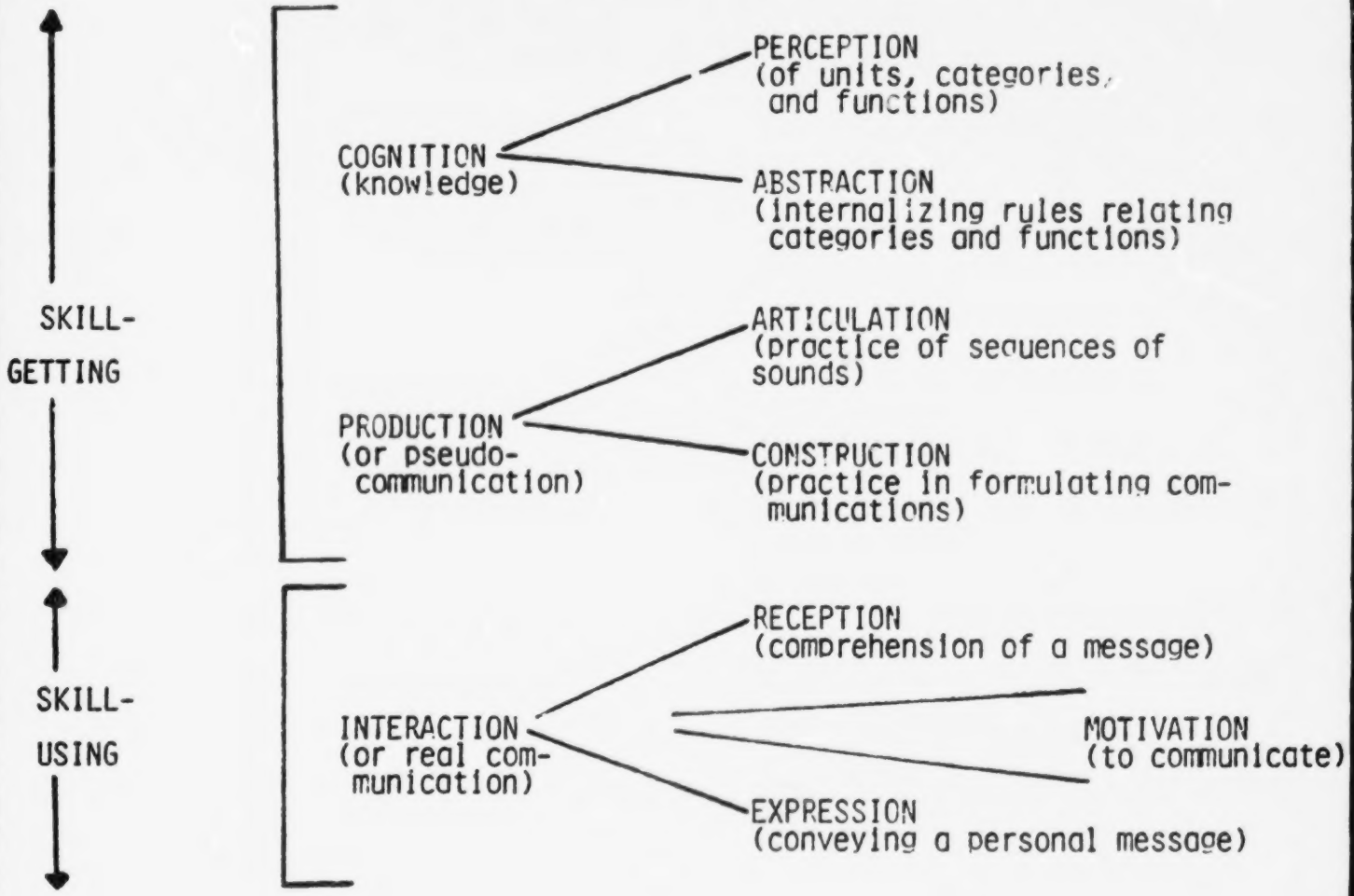
(5) will not inhibit the ultimate acquisition of the full range of variation displayed by educated native speakers.[33]

Wilga Rivers has proposed a schema of the processes involved in learning to communicate [next page].[34]

This schema is not sequential, but parallel--skill-getting and skill-using go hand in hand continuously. There is genuine interaction from the beginning with the students exploring the full scope of what is being learned. Bridging the gap between skill-getting and skill-using is not automatic. The skill-getting activities must be so designed as to be already pseudo-communication, leading naturally to spontaneous communication activities. Lastly, knowledge and intensive practice (skill-getting) are not enough to ensure confident interaction, which itself requires practice in actual, purposeful conversational exchange with others.[35]

It is indeed possible that communicative language use cannot be taught, but it most assuredly can be learned--and opportunities for such learning should become routine in the foreign-language classroom simultaneously with the earliest stages of skill-gett ng. No one can acquire sufficient skills to communicate in a language if these skills are never used for communication. So, the problem becomes one of carefully sequencing learning activities from mechancial mastery

PROCESSES INVOLVED IN LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE



of linguistic forms to communicative interaction in the target language.[36]

There are four stages in this sequencing process, moving from mechanical learning to free communication: mechanical drills, meaningful drills, communicative drills, and communicative interaction.[37] If communicative drills and communication activities are not present in the classroom from the beginning, students will find it very difficult to move from the structured security of routine drillwork to the insecurity of reliance on their own resources, and this adventurous spirit is a necessity in spontaneous language use.

Rivers' skill-getting processes incorporate the first three classes of drills which provide the practice in the mechanical manipulations of grammatical features leading to an understanding of and facility in using them in real communicative contexts.

The stage of cognition is obviously where we must begin.

COGNITION. Cognition is based on the knowledge of the way language operates, including the similarities and differences between the written and the spoken language and the variability of rules according to the degree of formality of the spoken or written communication. If interaction is the ultimate goal, the language activities the students use should be a purposeful communication, either practical or imaginative, which is expressed so that it is comprehensible to another person.[38]

PERCEPTION. Listening comprehension activities are of utmost importance, for if a student cannot perceive that there is a systematic message being sent and cannot differentiate between the kinds of messages, (s)he will not be able to assimilate what is heard into a meaningful unit and will not be able to understand the one message and to reproduce similar spontaneous messages.

Rivers' stages of abstraction and production are obviously closely linked. It is here that mechanical, meaningful and communicative drills evolve to pseudo-communicative activities which furnish the firm grounding and framework for eventual interaction.

1. Mechanical drills.

In these drills there is complete control of the response and there is only one correct way of responding. These drills help students memorize patterns and achieve automatic use of manipulative patterns--they provide practice in mechanical associations such as adjective-noun agreement, verb endings, interrogative word order, etc.

In intensive/construction practice, student correction should be made so that the student becomes aware of possible errors and is familiar with acceptable, rule-governed sequences so that (s)he can monitor his own production and work toward its improvement in spontaneous interaction.[45]

It is at this stage that pseudo-communication should begin to take place. The teacher provides a realistic situation controlled only by the grammatical topic being studied in which the student is encouraged to put the concept to use. In using the concept, the entire linguistic machine is put into motion with the concept synchronizing the communicative act and weaving the intricate pattern of meaning.

a) La Maison des Jeunes [Youth Center].

French Youth Centers offer a wide variety of activities. Ask whether the following students often engage in the activities mentioned.

Modèle: Nathalie danse avec Michel. [Nathalie danses with Michel.]
Est-ce qu'elle danse souvent avec Michel? [Does she dance with Michel often?]

ABSTRACTION. In this component of cognition, students must demonstrate an abstract comprehension of the workings of the grammatical system. Success in these exercises does not necessarily mean that the student will be able to think of the appropriate rule at the appropriate moment when he is composing sentences himself, but it is indeed a step on the way.[43] Certain exercises teach students that the grammatical concepts, even if learned in isolation, are interrelated in a given language system. Students must ultimately be able to use the concept in a matrix of other grammatical concepts by consciously selecting what he needs from this matrix.

a) In the following situation, which question is appropriate?

Paul is looking for his girlfriend at the airport but cannot find her. He is talking to a friend.

1. Comment t'appelles-tu?
   [What's you name?]
2. Elle t'a parlé?
   [Did she speak to you?]
3. Où est le buffet?
   [Where's the snack bar?]
4. C'est elle là-bas?
   [Is that her over there?]

b) OPTIONS. There is usually more than one way to ask a question or give information. Match each phrase in the first column with an expression in the second column that would mean approximately the same thing.

1. Où est la banque?
2. Est-ce que vous aimez Montréal?
3. Je voudrais envoyer une lettre.
4. Je cherche une pharmacie.

a. Est-ce que la vie à Montréal est agréable?
b. Où est-ce qu'il y a une pharmacie?
c. Pourriez-vous m'indiquer où il y a une banque?
d. Est-ce qu'il y a un bureau de poste près d'ici?[44]

However the grammatical concept is introduced, the students' activity must be directed as soon as possible to the concept in use.

a) Am I making a statement or asking a question?

1. Jacques habite à Paris.	1. Jacques lives in Paris.
2. Robert habite à Genève?	2. Does Robert live in Geneva?
3. Isabelle parle anglais?	3. Does Isabelle speak English?
4. Elle est française.[39]	4. She is French.

b) Am I making a suggestion or asking a question?

1. Allons chez moi!	1. Let's go to my house!
2. Achetez le journal!	2. Buy the newspaper!
3. Achetez-vous souvent ce magazine?	3. Do you often buy this magazine?
4. Aimez-vous la musique pop?[40]	4. Do you like pop music?

c) Am I talking about a man or a woman?

1. Avec laquelle travailles-tu?	1. Which one do you work with?
2. Avec lequel es-tu allé au cinéma hier?	2. Which one did you go to the movies with yesterday?
3. Auquel vas-tu téléphoner?	3. Which one are you going to call?
4. A laquelle penses-tu?[41]	4. Which one are you thinking about?

d) Am I talking about a person or a thing?

1. Qu'est-ce que tu écoutes maintenant?	1. What are you listening to now?
2. Qui est-ce que tu regardes si fixement?	2. Who are you looking at so hard?
3. Qu'est-ce qui te tourmente en ce moment?	3. What's troubling you right now?
4. Qui est-ce qui t'a donné cette idée absurde?[40]	4. Who gave you that foolish idea?

1. Pierre joue au ping-pong.	Pierre plays ping-pong.
2. Sylvie parle russe.	Sylvie speaks Russian.
3. Hélène joue au tennis.	Hélène plays tennis.
4. Marc parle anglais.	Marc speaks English.
5. Jacques et Antoine jouent au basketball.[46]	Jacques and Antoine play basketball.

b) Pourquoi? [Why?]

Whatever Tao says he does, Isabelle asks him why. Play both roles as shown in the model.

Modèle: J'aime Paris. [I like Paris.]

Tao: J'aime Paris. [I like Paris]

Isabelle: Oui...mais pourquoi est-ce que tu aimes Paris? [Yes... but why do you like Paris?]

1. Je travaille beaucoup.	I work a lot.
2. Je voyage souvent.	I often travel.
3. J'étudie l'anglais.	I am studying English.
4. Je parle toujours français.	I always speak French.
5. Je joue souvent au tennis.[47]	I often play tennis.

c) Avec qui? [With whom?]

Isabelle tells Patrick what her friends do. Patrick wants to know with whom they do these things. Play both roles as shown in the model.

Modèle: Jacques voyage. [Jacques travels.]

Isabelle: Il voyage. [He travels.]

Patrick: Avec qui voyage-t-il? [Who does he travel with?]

1. Alain étudie.	Alain studies.
2. Isabelle travaille.	Isabelle works.
3. Monique habite à Montréal.	Monique lives in Montreal.
4. Paul joue au tennis.	Paul plays tennis.

5. Philippe visite l'Italie.[48] Philippe visits Italy.

d) Questions. Some people are very nosy and ask a lot of questions. Be nosy yourself and formulate questions using the expressions in parentheses.

Tu travailles. (Où?) Où est-ce que tu travailles?

[You work. (Where?)] [Where do you work?]

1. Vous voyagez. [Comment? Pourquoi? Avec qui?]

   [You travel. (How? Why? With whom?)]

2. Monsieur Rémi travaille. [Pourquoi? Pour qui? Quand?]

   [Mr. Rémi works. (Why? For whom? When?)]

3. Jacqueline parle espagnol. [Comment? Avec qui? Pourquoi?]

   [Jacqueline speaks Spanish. (How? With whom? Why?)]

4. Anne et Marc téléphonent. [A qui? Pourquoi? A quelle heure?][49]

   [Anne and Marc call. (Whom? Why? When?)]

3) Dans le bus (On the bus). A very talkative Frenchman is travelling by bus. He talks about himself to the person sitting next to him and would like to get similar information from this person. Complete his questions, using the interrogative expression that corresponds to the underlined information.

J'habite à Paris. Et vous? Où est-ce que vous habitez?

[I live in Paris. And you?] [Where do you live?]

1. Je travaille à Passy. Et vous?

   [I work in Passy. And you?]

2. Je travaille pour une compagnie internationale. Et vous?

   [I work for an international company. And you?]

3. J'aime voyager en bus. Et vous?

[I like to travel by bus, And you?]

4. J'aime voyager en septembre. Et vous?

[I like to travel in September. And you?]

5. Je joue au tennis dans un club sportif. Et vous?[50]

[I play tennis at an athletic club. And you?]

2. Meaningful Drills.

As in the mechanical drills, the expected terminal behavior is the same--automatic use of manipulative patterns. However, here the students cannot complete the drills without understanding what he is saying structurally or semantically. There is still control of the response although it may be expressed in more than one way. There is a right answer, and the student is supplied with the information necessary for responding, either by the teacher, the textbook, the classroom situation or the assigned reading.[51]

a) Listed below are a series of statements that Jean-Luc made in an interview. His statements refer to himself, to his sister Marie-Ange, and his brother Antoine. For each statement he made, write in French a question that the interviewer might have asked him. Pay particular attention to the pronoun used by the interviewer so that you know who the question refers to.

1. Le reporter: _____

Jean-Luc: No, he hates to study.

2. Le reporter: _____

Jean-Luc: No, I don't speak English.

3. Le reporter: _____

Jean-Luc: She prefers the beach.

4. Le reporter: _____

Jean-Luc: Yes, we like camping a lot.[52]

b) REACTIONS. Imagine that the following people make the following remarks. Use your imagination and find a comeback.

your roommate: "I went to the movies yesterday."

Did you like the movie? or What did you do after? or Well, you didn't study?

1. a cousin: "I took a wonderful trip to Switzerland."
2. a friend: "We watched an interesting program on T.V."
3. your biology professor: "You didn't hand in your test yesterday."[53]

c) DETECTIVE. You are a private detective and have sent your assistant to trail René Filou, an international gambler. Read your assistant's report and then ask for more details.

At two o'clock, René Filou goes into a café.

What café did he go into?

1. He talks to a young woman.
2. At five o'clock, he goes to a store.
3. He buys some clothes.
4. At seven o'clock he goes into a restaurant.
5. He has dinner with friends.[54]

d) CURIOSITÉ (Curiosity). Paul explains to Caroline what he did last weekend. Caroline wants him to be more precise. Play Caroline's role.

I saw someone.	Caroline: Who did you see?
I saw something.	Caroline: What did you see?
1. I bumped into someone.	3. I invited someone.
2. I did something.	4. I bought something.[55]

Meaningful drills also incorporate comprehension type question and answer drills based on readings.

3. Communicative Drills.

The objective of communicative drills is to produce normal speech for communication and we must insist on comprehensible speech. The control here is very loose and the student can say whatever he wants. However, the drill is designed to elicit the pattern the class is working on. Now the student supplies new information. Whatever the student answer, the teacher cannot anticipate it. Although these drills are time-consuming due to the students' fumbling and hesitations, the students are developing a communicative ability and enjoying it. Since students need the encouragement to express themselves, only those errors that lead to miscomprehension should be corrected. These drills are not yet true communication because we are still in the realm of the cue-response pattern.[56]

a) QUESTIONS/INTERVIEW.

Ask another student about his or her possessions. You might want to report the results of your interview to the rest of the class.

Example: Ask if he/she has a motorbike,

Sylvia, do you have a motorbike?

ASK IF...

1. he/she has any brothers or sisters
2. he/she has a roommate
3. he/she has any plants
4. he/she has a guitar
5. he/she has a dog or a cat[57]

b) CONVERSATION CARDS

Students are divided into pairs and ask each other questions listed on a conversation or interview card.

CARD 1	CARD 2
Ask X...what sport s/he likes	Ask Y...if s/he is athletic
...if s/he plays basketball	...if s/he likes basketball
...if s/he prefers ski or golf	...if s/he plays golf
...if s/he plays tennis	...if s/he prefers tennis or football[58]

c) Choose the job or jobs which interest you and go for an interview with your eventual employer. Other students can play the roles of the employers. To help you, here are some suggestions for questions the employer and candidate might ask.

SUGGESTIONS FOR QUESTIONS THE EMPLOYER MIGHT ASK

age and nationality, work experience, references, salary desired, personality and qualities (conscientious, dilligent, patient, etc.), talents and interests (know how to swim, drive, cook, take care of children, etc.)

SUGGESTIONS FOR QUESTIONS THE CANDIDATE MIGHT ASK

responsibilities, work hours, salary offered, free time, possibility of extra work, possibility of being lodged and fed, languages spoken, advantages and disadvantages of the job.[59]

d) CONVERSATION ON A TRAIN. Imagine that you are on the train from Paris to Geneva and that you strike up a conversation with another passenger. What would you say in French if you wanted to find out the following information? (You have already learned enough French in previous chapters and do not have to look up words in a dictionary. You will have to be flexible, however, and think of the different ways to communicate meaning--without a word-for-word translation.)

After you have prepared your questions, you might want to use them to act out the scene with another student.

Ask...

1. if he/she is French (Swiss, Belgian)
2. where he/she lives
3. if it is close to Paris (Geneva, Brussels)
4. if he/she likes to travel
5. if he/she is a student (and if so, what he/she studies)[60]

e) AT THE YOUTH HOSTEL. Several English hikers are spending the night in a French youth hostel. They are talking among themselves. The French who are there understand nothing. Can you help them out?

1. Where did you buy your ski jacket?
2. Who told you about this youth hostel?
3. What are you going to do tomorrow?
4. What do I do if I see a snake?
5. What's a "sac à dos"?[61]

It should be pointed out that interrogation is a very common method of introducing other grammatical features in drillwork and in normal classroom activities. The constant reintroduction of interrogative forms only helps to reinforce the notion of the importance of questions to elicit information of all sorts and to enhance the cyclical nature of grammar teaching as opposed to the traditional linear manner of presentation of discrete elements.

INTERACTION. As we move to interaction, which is actual skill-using, we should keep in mind that any natural interaction activity should have intrinsic interest for the learner. If exercises and activities are constructed around natural interaction activities, students will be more likely to grasp the full impact of how all grammatical components mesh together to create authentic meaningful utterances. Such normal interaction contexts include

1. establishing and maintaining social relations
2. expressing one's reactions
3. hiding one's intentions
4. talking one's way out of trouble
5. seeking and giving information
6. learning or teaching others to do or make something
7. conversing over the telephone
8. solving problems
9. discussing ideas
10. playing with language
11. acting out social roles
12. entertaining others
13. displaying one's achievements
14. sharing leisure activities.[62]

In a foreign-language classroom it is extremely difficult to approximate or create a real-life situation in which the student would have to call on his own resources to initiate and maintain a natural interactional exchange with no possibility of recourse to his native language. Still, if the teacher sets forth only the situation, the students would have to create the appropriate utterances which would satisfactorily carry out the task.

a) Suppose some French students on a trip to the United States are visiting your campus. Create ten questions you would like to ask them about their impressions about the United States.[63]

b) CURIOSITY OR INDISCRETION? Make up some questions that you would like to ask other people in your class about what they do, have done, or are going to do at different times. If someone asks you, in turn, a question you consider indiscrete or too personal, you may say tactfully,

"That question is too indiscrete" or simply "I don't know."

examples: What did you do last week?

What are you doing Sunday afternoon?

What are you going to do after class?[64]

c) JOURNALISTS AND CELEBRITIES.

Interviewing celebrities of the moment is one of the favorite activities of TV journalists, be it in France, Canada or the United States. Imagine that you are one of these journalists and choose the type of interview which you prefer.

a. Choose a personality from the world of TV or the movies who particularly interests you and prepare a list of questions you would like to ask him/her. Another student can then play the role of this star and answer your questions.

b. Imagine that you are the host of a talk show and that you are interviewing one or more personalities from the political, sports or art world. The role of these personalities will be played by another student in class.

c. A student plays the role of a figure in the political world who is giving a press conference. Other students will be the journalists who ask him/her questions. Others can analyze the content of this conference.[65]

d) Find a provocative picture in a magazine and write down all of the questions it brings to mind. Then with a classmate, decide upon appropriate answers to these questions.

e) Teachers generally ask most of the questions in class. Now the tables are turned! Interview your teacher to find out what you have wanted to know about him/her but were afraid to ask.

f) We have just finished reading THE STRANGER by Albert Camus. We will now re-enact the trial of Meursault. Two students will play the roles of the two lawyers. We will need, in addition, a judge, and the following characters: Meursault, Marie, Céleste, the Director of the Old Folk's Home, Salamano, Thomas Pérez. The rest of the class will be the jury.

g) You have just captured an international spy. Now you must interrogate him to get all of the vital information needed so that you can close his case.

h) Dramatic improvisation is a very effective, realistic activity in which students are put in totally unexpected situations (of the teacher's devising) and must react within the confines of the situation. Similarly, the reactions and the comments of the other students involved are quite unpredictable.

In interaction activities, a student must recognize and understand the message sent to him (RECEPTION), must want to or see a need to communicate (MOTIVATION), and must be able to express his own personal meaning in response (EXPRESSION) so that the exchange does not become a monologue.

Therefore, even with the constraints and restrictions imposed by (1) the need for simplification of a highly variable, complex language system, (2) the desire to teach a style and level of language acceptable to native speakers which will ultimately allow the learner to acquire the full variation used by native speakers, and (3) the use of patterns that characterize natural speech, we can provide our students with widely varied activities for practice in relatively natural pseudo-communication. We can bridge the gap to true communication by allowing our students to use the linguistic baggage they have acquired as they

acquire it, and by constantly re-introducing this material so that grammatical concepts are not seen as discrete units but belong to the very fabric of the concept system known as language.

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